

METRO/REGIONAL BRIEFING

RAMSEY COUNTY

'Drug court' gets federal funding

Ramsey County will get almost \$500,000 in federal money to support the county's substance abuse court, designed to help nonviolent offenders get treatment for drug and alcohol abuse.

U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum announced the Department of Justice grant Tuesday at the Ramsey County courthouse. It is intended to help fund the court's treatment, housing, drug testing and educational efforts, which are aimed at reducing recidivism among offenders in the system.

"We know drugs and alcohol are causing problems," said Minnesota Supreme Court Associate Justice James Gilbert, who also spoke at the announcement. "They're also driving up budgets in the local, county and state level. ... Seventy-five percent of the felonies in Minnesota are drug- and alcohol-related."

Ramsey County District Judge Joanne Smith, one of the founders of the program, said it started handling cases in 2002. It is a voluntary program and involves largely property crimes and low-level drug dealing, but it isn't a catch-all drug court like the one Hennepin County operates.

— Tim Nelson